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ABSTRACT

Information was gathered about current state interest, activity, and concerns related to performance assessment for students. The Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing of the University of California (Los Angeles) conducted telephone interviews with directors of testing in each of the 50 states in the spring of 1990. Each state testing officer was asked about the state's activity or interest in alternatives to multiple-choice testing at the state level, using a relatively inclusive definition of alternative assessment that did not include simple direct writing assessment. About half the states are currently involved in performance assessment to some degree. Most of the activity and interest was found in the areas of math and science, followed by social studies, expanded writing, and expanded language. Five major areas of concern were noted: (1) costs; (2) logistics; (3) technical aspects; (4) support for implementation of performance-based assessment; and (5) the role of performance-based assessment in a state testing program. In spite of this interest, about 50% of the states were not currently implementing or planning to implement performance-based state assessments for a variety of reasons. One table summarizes selected responses from the states. (SLD)

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UCLA Center for Research on Evaluation
Standards, and Student Testing

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Monitoring the Impact of Testing
and Evaluation Innovations Project

State Activity and Interest Concerning Performance-Based Assessment

Project Director: Pamela R. Aschbacher

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Center for the Study of Evaluation
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Los Angeles

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STATE ACTIVITY, INTEREST, AND CONCERNS IN PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

Why Are States Interested in Performance-Based Assessment?

Billions of dollars are spent each year on education, yet there is widespread dissatisfaction with the results among teachers and other educators, parents, policy makers, and business. There is deep concern about the future of our country because of the perceived failure of our educational system. Reform efforts, stemming from *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission for Educational Excellence, 1983) and other reports critical of the quality of American education, have focused attention on achievement outcomes and the role of assessment in school improvement.

Over the past decade educators have increasingly recognized that the vast majority of existing standardized achievement tests, relied upon by many states and districts, are wholly inadequate. These instruments fail to describe student performance over the breadth and depth of implemented curricula, leading to inappropriate inferences and poor educational policy decisions (Baker, Freeman, & Clayton, in press). In addition, the common test format (primarily speeded multiple-choice items) has a deleterious influence on how information is presented, learned, and retained. Both typical standardized tests and many created by teachers to grade students tend to emphasize recall of knowledge and provide little information about the level of student

understanding or quality of thinking (Nickerson, 1989) These tests assess learning in an artificial, decontextualized manner that is removed from the ways students actually learn and will need to apply knowledge beyond the classroom (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989).

The need for new assessment approaches is critical. Without a clear window on students' higher order thinking, not only do we fail to evaluate our students and instructional programs adequately, but we also communicate to teachers, parents, and students that these skills are less important since they are not tested (Baker, Freeman, & Clayton, 1990). The causal connection between testing and instruction is well documented. Thus, policy makers, large scale testing directors, and others are turning to alternative assessment methods as a tool for school improvement.

What are the desired characteristics of alternative assessment? There is no single method of "authentic" assessment. Rather, there is a variety of approaches, including portfolios of student work over time, exhibits or displays of knowledge and skills, open-ended questions with no single right answer, and hands-on experimentation or demonstration. The common threads uniting these approaches as performance-based assessment are:

- students perform, create, produce or do something that requires higher level thinking or problem solving skills (not just one right answer);

- assessment tasks are also meaningful, challenging, engaging, *instructional* activities;
- tasks are set in a real-world context or close simulation;
- process and effort are assessed as well as product; and
- the criteria and standards for performance are public and known in advance.

The concept of performance-based assessment has seductive face validity. It promises to exemplify the broader and deeper range of desired performance more than multiple choice questions ever could and to inform change towards better placement, curriculum, and instruction. But with so much at stake (time, money, widespread training, curriculum changes, credibility, students' futures), many educators and testing experts are concerned whether these new directions are, in fact, better than previous ones and will not fall prey to the same kinds of problems that plague traditional multiple choice testing when it is made to serve both large and small scale purposes, enumerated by Linn, Graue, and Sanders (1989).

An important step for those who would consider and/or develop new assessment methods is to examine what others have already tried to accomplish, what barriers or problems they have encountered, what success they have had, and what issues or concerns remain to be addressed. Unfortunately,many state

testing offices are suffering from serious budget constraints and do not have the staff to search the educational literature or systematically monitor new efforts at the state or local level. Budget restrictions have resulted in severe limitations on travel outside the state, thus reducing the number of conferences and meetings that testing officers can attend to obtain information and technical assistance. The purpose of this paper is to share information about current state interest, activity and concerns related to performance assessment.

Which States are Involved in Performance Based Assessment and What Are They Doing?

CRESST conducted telephone interviews with the directors of testing in each of the fifty states during spring, 1990. Each state testing officer was interviewed about the state's activity or interest in alternatives to multiple-choice testing at the state level, using a relatively inclusive definition of "alternative assessment" including open-ended written questions, hands-on experiments, performances or exhibits, portfolios of work, and so forth. Since the focus was on *new* approaches, simple direct writing assessments were not included unless they involved writing in the content areas, portfolios of writing, extended writing and editing over time, or other innovative approaches. The accompanying table summarizes current performance assessment activity or interest by listing the fifty states grouped according to

their level of involvement. To facilitate networking, the content areas of involvement or interest are noted in the table.

About half of the states are currently involved in performance based assessment to varying degrees and are rather evenly divided among three categories:

(a) those who have had some performance based assessment already in place for several years although some of these efforts are quite modest in scope, such as North Carolina's few geometry proofs, and are not done every year,

(b) those who are developing performance based assessments (including actively developing kits and tasks, and piloting them in a few classrooms), and

(c) those who are exploring possibilities with committed staff time, state level committees, and/or working with districts to help them develop new assessment methods before changing the statewide testing program.

Two states, Texas and Kentucky, both states in which the testing programs are high stakes, plan to include performance based assessment in new state testing programs within a couple of years and are poised to explore specific options.

As can be seen from the table, most of the activity and interest are in the areas of math (21 states) and science (17), followed by social studies (14), expanded writing (11), and expanded language (8). A few states are also involved with or interested in a performance based approach to

assessing reading, music, art, and physical education. A recent CRESST survey of state testing directors about direct writing assessment revealed that at least three states are considering assessing writing and other skills in cooperative group settings.

Despite all this interest, about half the states are not currently implementing or planning to implement performance-based state assessment for a variety of reasons. Some are awaiting a change of governor or state education officer, others have no staff or budget to pursue alternative assessment possibilities, and some are waiting to see what will prove feasible in other states before committing their resources to particular approaches.

What Are the Major Concerns That States Have About Performance Based Assessment?

Five major areas of concern were noted by states in discussing performance based assessment: costs, logistics, technical concerns, support for innovation, and the role of performance based assessment in a state testing program,. Each of these is discussed below.

Cost. As might be expected given the current poor economic climate, the number one barrier cited was cost. Testing directors noted that the costs of alternative measures can be enormously higher than standardized multiple choice tests (e.g. some states mentioned figures of $3-10 versus $1.50 per student). These higher costs reflect

increases at all stages of development and administration: developing the actual tasks and scoring criteria, public relations, training, administering, substitute teachers to cover teachers' time in training and administering, scoring, processing and analyzing the data, and reporting and explaining the results. Costs are higher because performance based assessment is usually a significant departure from what has been done in the past, and new projects always cost more in the beginning. In addition, performance based assessment is far more labor intensive than standardized multiple choice testing. Training, for example, may be required for at least four different purposes: training the State Education Agencies staff regarding new purposes and methods, training people to administer the tests and to score them, and training teachers and administrators regarding the new approach to assessment and appropriate curriculum revisions.

A number of solutions were suggested by testing directors to overcome the problem of high costs. Among these is recognition that some of the costs may be spread over other budgets, such as staff development and curriculum development. Several states noted that implementing performance based assessment had required much teacher training but that its impact on curriculum and instruction had been worth it. Not only had teachers been trained in new assessment approaches that they could utilize in instruction, their morale and incentive to take risks had been raised significantly. Testimonials aside, it is important to

consider whether the specific teacher training required for a given performance based assessment approach comprises (or could be revised to comprise) the type of staff development needed in a particular district or state.

Another solution to the cost barrier is to test a sample of the school population rather than every pupil. This approach is far more feasible logistically as well; however, some policy makers tend to distrust sampling and to insist on testing every pupil. In other cases, sampling is eschewed because diagnostic information on individuals is desired, and there are only sufficient resources for one test.

Performance based assessment is labor-intensive testing, and scoring can be a particularly costly aspect. States differ in their approaches to this problem. Some feel it is cheaper to utilize professional scoring services, while others feel it pays to train their own teachers, particularly when one objective is to educate the teachers and to encourage certain types of instructional practices (such as writing in the content areas).

On the other hand, it may be too expensive to maintain a commitment to using the state's teachers as test administrators and raters. Teachers usually must be recompensed for each extra hour they spend in training or rating, and substitute teachers must be paid to cover their classes. The cost of travel to regional training and/or scoring sites can be quite high, causing states to weigh the technical and fiscal costs and benefits of regional versus

residential scoring. Remote scoring, with scorers networking through computers and receiving immediate reliability information, may eventually help lower costs, but development of viable procedures remains to be accomplished.

Some states mentioned that they are able to keep costs down by maintaining excellent working relations with local education agencies, who may be willing and able to share the costs as well as the benefits. However, in many states districts are also suffering from the poor economy and may well resent mandated testing programs that require them to take staff time away from other important tasks and to pay for substitutes, travel and training.

Utilizing volunteers from colleges, community organizations, and the private sector helped a couple of other states keep their costs down. Unfortunately, this approach may require special efforts to maintain sufficient standardization of administration and reliability of scoring. On the other hand, it may be a good way to involve the larger community in education issues and may have other outcomes as well.

A few districts have been able to create models of innovative assessment and instruction at the local level with funds from private foundations or corporations. Unfortunately, the impact of such models may not trickle up as constraints on state education agency staff and budget prevent many state testing offices from being as familiar as they would like with local innovations. Businesses and

funding agencies might provide some solution to the cost barrier by supporting low cost models, by providing for extensive visibility of successful projects at the state as well as local level, and by supporting models that address cross-level issues.

Logistics. Many of the states that do not currently have a performance based assessment program cited the complicated logistics of such testing as a significant barrier. "There is too much paper to shuffle," "too much equipment to keep track of and move from site to site" and "too much class time spent on testing" are common refrains. Sampling or voluntary inclusion of districts or schools are approaches that have reduced the logistical problems for some states.

However, there are several reasons why sampling is not a good solution for some. A number of states, such as Illinois and New Jersey, have a legislative mandate to test all students at given grade levels, so they cannot use sampling or matrix sampling to improve the feasibility of using performance based assessment in such states without a change in the law. Other states have policymakers who do not trust sampling and who prefer every pupil testing for accountability purposes. States with a need for diagnostic testing and too little funding for multiple testing programs may eschew sampling (and performance based assessment) because it cannot offer information at the pupil level.

Some states are experimenting with testing pupils in pairs or groups to reduce the amount of equipment, paper, and time involved. Others rotate the content areas tested across years. Some are considering testing integrated subject areas (e.g. writing in social studies or science) to conserve time. The latter approach, however, requires significant further development (see Baker et al, in press, for a discussion of an approach to writing in social studies that may eventually prove useful in this regard).

Hawaii has a novel approach to handling the extensive equipment that comprises its alternative performance based graduation exam: a traveling van visits each school where it is needed.

Another logistical problem is the timeliness of results. It is harder to get results scored, analyzed, and reported quickly with performance based assessment than with the standardized multiple choice exams that take advantage of highly automated scoring systems. Particularly when teachers are used as raters, obtaining quick feedback on a large population during the school year may be difficult. Where timeliness is particularly important, states or districts may find it necessary to compromise by reducing the complexity of the scoring schemes or of the analyses of results or relying on commercial scoring services. As performance based assessment is used more often, its scoring and reporting will probably become more efficient over time.

Some testing officers doubt that teachers are ready to administer hands-on science tests yet since so few of them currently use such approaches in their own classrooms. One motivational workshop is not sufficient. They may be motivated, but they need concrete, intensive training, which may be quite costly and time-consuming for the state to develop as well as to deliver. Doing so also requires some performance based assessment expertise at the state education agency, which may take some time to attain.

While it may be desirable to cycle as many teachers through administrator and/or rater training as possible in order to educate them and provide a sense of ownership, they approach reduces the efficiency and reliability resulting from using a few well-trained administrators or raters.

Technical concerns. Many states are aware that technical concerns such as reliability and validity are not just of interest to statistians but are *central* to their decision whether to include performance based assessment in statewide assessment programs. As one state testing officer put it:

> *It's important that tests have credibility so that we don't waste time arguing over data, but rather schools can take action to improve.*

In today's economic climate it is clear that no state has the time or money to waste on assessment efforts that have low credibility and little likelihood of providing a basis for school improvement.

Whether the test is performance based assessment or traditional multiple choice, reliability of administration and scoring and validity of measures are especially important when there are significant consequences tied to students' "competence" as measured by the test, i.e., in "high stakes" testing situations. Such stakes may have implications for individuals, such as graduation, and/or for schools, such as accreditation or rewards. It is important to be fair through such strategies as multiple judges, content validation by subject matter experts, highly structured rating systems and rater training, multiple opportunities to pass, equivalency of domains, equating, continuity of content, and security of test content. But beyond simply *being* fair, reliable,and valid, states now find it necessary to *document* that they have used the most current and well respected approaches to reliability and validity in case they must defend their methods in court.

Another concern with performance based assessment, but seldom mentioned by states, is the notion of generalizability of topic or task. Performance based assessment tryes to align assessment with our best intentions for instruction, hoping that actual instruction will move in the intended direction. We are trying to avoid the situation in which teachers focus too heavily on previous test content at the expense of other important content or process, and students superficially or temporarily learn information with little deep understanding or ability to apply it. In order to

accomplish this goal, we need to adequately sample from the broad range of content or topics and process or tasks in a systematic way. For example, to know how well students can write poetry, it must be included in the domain of possible content and process to be tested, just as with multiple choice tests. We don't want to end up with teachers teaching just those thirteen geometry proofs that appeared on the last test

Furthermore, to compare schools or districts across the state, it is necessary to be concerned about how prescriptive to be in terms of what is tested, the test situation, the amount and type of coaching that is permissible by the teacher or test administrator, and how performances are judged. To summarize results across a state, it is difficult with a decentralized system where every district is doing their own thing and there is little comparability of processes, time of year tested, the population of students tested, and so forth. In some states, the SEA helps districts to articulate and accomplish their own goals rather than administering a single state approach.

Judging of performance is not as simple and straightforward or as efficient and effective as some would claim. Juding portfolios, performances, or open-ended answers may take a lot of thinking to come to consensus on standards and criteria.

Many states also recognize that credibility and usefulness are directly linked to how the results are

quantified and reported. There are few extant models of how to report the results of open-ended questions or portfolio results, for instance, at the state level.

Support for implementation. Support for the implementation of performance based assessment is important at several levels: the public, parents and students, the school and district, the state education agency, and the legislature and governor's office.

Changes in the governor or state superintendent of schools affect what is proposed, implemented, and supported, and the anticipation of such changes tends to create unproductive wait time while people wait for decisions to be made or funding to be committed. Newly elected or appointed office holders may refrain from supporting new ideas such as performance based assessment unless there is strong popular support for them.

A few state legislatures are moving towards heavier oversight of schools through assessment. They are now requiring comparison of districts and schools where minimal statewide testing existed before. In some states there will be room for performance based assessments of higher order thinking skills, but in general, the focus in these states is on normative comparisons with traditional multiple choice tests. Even the new NAEP tests will not be relied upon because of past anomalies (e.g. with the reading test) or because of too slow reporting.

State testing officers felt that policy makers represented a wide range of views on the subject of performance based assessment. A few legislators are encouraged by the notion of "measurement-driven instruction" to move beyond multiple choice tests, but others are unfamiliar with this territory and need to be apprised of the possibilities. Some legislators think performance based assessment is easy to accomplish, so the state education agencies feel the need to compensate for this enthusiasm with a "go slow" approach. Other policy makers feel that norm references tests are more comprehensive than performance based assessments (e.g. covering more objectives and subobjectives, and with a deeper set of items per domain). The effects of Cannell's criticisms are evident in the doubt and suspicion towards educators' integrity and credibility that are apparent in some quarters. Some policymakers think the push towards new performance measures is simply a way for educators to try to dodge Cannell's criticisms.

Many policymakers are interested in school reform at the building and classroom level, so they reject sampling plans in favor of census testing yet mandate quick turnaround of results to schools and districts. Such an approach greatly increases the costs and logistical problems associated with performance based assessment. For example, one state this year will be spending a million dollars to score 300,000 essays and report the results in 60 days.

The public and parents tend to be uninformed and somewhat uncaring about state testing unless it directly affects them, such as their child's graduation. They do need to feel assured that such tests are valid measures and will be scored reliably. Parents may also be concerned that students tested with performance based assessments will not be adequately prepared for later gateway tests, such as the SAT, ACT or job entry tests.

Students, particularly twelfth graders, may feel imposed upon when asked to take performance based assessments that they perceive as more difficult and time-consuming than the traditional multiple choice tests, and they may not cooperate or be motivated to try on the tests. On the other hand, one state that has piloted some hands-on science lab experiments with elementary students found that they really enjoyed the experience and would like to do more of it.

A move to performance based assessment as part of a state assessment program would entail development of new areas of expertise at the state department of education and perhaps changes in the relationship of the assessment division to the division of curriculum and instruction. In some states, the additional NAEP testing that is scheduled in the near future together with existing norm-referenced and criterion-referenced testing programs argues against the state education agency taking on any additional testing programs at this time. Several states noted that taking on any additional performance based assessment testing now would

have to be done without additional funding or time alloted, thereby making it virtually impossible.

Some states in which teacher competency is a touchy political topic may feel reluctant to push ahead with new performance based assessment to encourage new instructional strategies and content. In this milieu there may be negative consequences to using assessment techniques that are too far ahead of current instructional practices and that may threaten teachers with being viewed as "incompetent."

In general, much of the impetus for the new performance based approach to assessment has come from the local level, where teachers and curriculum experts are tired of the overemphasis on standardized multiple choice tests and recall rather than higher order thinking skills. Many of them are enthusiastic about increasing the attention paid to other content areas and writing across the curriculum and are eager for more involvement of teachers in the assessment process.

Surprisingly, however, securing acceptance of the logistics and outcomes of performance based assessment by teachers and administrators can be a problem. Despite their denigration of norm referenced testss as trivial, teachers and administrators often value the supposed objectivity of multiple choice tests, and they tend to prefer the ease of administration associated with these traditional tests. For example, in one state which gave districts the opportunity to choose either the previously used norm referenced tests or the new performance tests in reading and writing at the

elementary grades, half the districts chose the old norm referenced tests. This state's testing director concluded that a lot of training and promotion of performance based assessment may be necessary to achieve acceptance and success with these new methods.

The amount of time taken away from the teachers' lesson plans, particularly at the high school level, may be a big disincentive for many teachers to participate in new performance based assessment testing programs. In one state where performance based assessment is intended to be as much instruction as assessment, fourteen days per year are to be devoted to performance based assessment As one of the testing officers of that state put it, "We may have to be creative and shorten the testing time in order to convince teachers that our assessment is really instruction."

Where local education agency budgets allow, paying teachers for training and scoring during summer months can be an incentive to cooperate with a new testing program. Some states with performance based assessment programs have allowed the teachers who administer the tests to keep the hands-on science lab equipment for use in their own classrooms after the testing is finished, providing both an incentive to participate and an encouragement to change instructional practices.

Support for performance based assessment at the local level is clearly a function of budget problems at both the state and local education agencies. As state education

agencies try to contain their costs, they may pass some of them on to local education agenciess, such as the cost of travel for teachers to attend training sessions or the cost of substitutes to cover teachers' classes while they are training for, administering or scoring tests. However, many local education agenciess are suffering budget cuts as well and are not in a position to be helpful. Cuts in local administrative jobs mean fewer people to do the same or greater work load, often with minimal support staff. In at least one state, the local director of research and evaluation has to oversee the administration of *seven* different testing programs and produce that many different annual reports of district testing results for accountability purposes.

One state noted that the sampling plan can impact local buy-in. To maximize schools' acceptance of performance based assessment as worthwhile and meaningful, the results must be seen as applying to them. In the past, this state found that state level results led teachers and administrators to think of performance based activities as enrichment, not as mainstream assessment and instruction. Bu when they switched to a sampling plan in which they could report performance data on individual school reports, schools were less likely to discount the results as irrelevant, and the data provided the necessary leverage to impact instruction.

Role of performance based assessment in a state testing program. Many state testing directors feel that performance

based assessment may have value to impact instructional practices in desirable directions, but they question whether such complicated and costly methods should be a part of state level assessment. Some argue that these methods are best used at the local level to inform instructional decision making. Others believe that state assessment policies and practices are powerful means to achieve school reform. What information should be or is best collected by the state and what by the local education agency? This question leads back to "Why are we testing?" Should the state program try to simply provide a view of overall state performance, influence local instructional efforts, or provide data to the district for its own use? Although these questions are valid regardless of the type of tests used by the state, the possible change to performance based assessment, which appears more difficult to administer at the state than local level, raises these questions anew.

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Table 1

CRESST Survey:

State Interest and Activity in
Performance-Based Assessment

STATES WITH ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS IN PLACE

CA In place (math) - developing more math, science, social studies, writing
DE In place (P.E., geography) -- no other plans
HI In place (math; alternative grad'n exam in life skills); -- exploring art, P.E.
ME In place (reading, math) - interested in science
MA In place (math, science, social studies, reading)
MI In place (music, art, P.E.) - have done science and career development in past - Interested in social studies; tentative plans in science
NY In place (science, math, social studies, 2nd language; listening, speaking)
NC In place (math) - interested in science, social studies, writing, speaking, 2nd language, P.E.

STATES CURRENTLY DEVELOPING/PILOTING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

AK Developing (portfolios in writing, interested in math)
AZ Developing (reading, writing, math, social studies, science; subjects may be integrated; includes portfolios, pre-reading & pre-writing)
CT Developing (math, science, writing, listening)
NJ Developing (reading & math (open-ended)
VT Developing (math & writing portfolios; encouraging schools to include writing across curriculum in portfolios; planning science, history, citizenship)

* Based on phone interviews with state testing officers and staff; includes various alternatives to multiple-choice testing but does not include writing assessments unless they involve portfolios, writing across the curriculum, or other innovative approaches.

STATES CURRENTLY EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES (via committees or staff)

AL Exploring (math)
CO Exploring (math, science)
IL Exploring (math) -- exploring working with districts on science; interested in social studies
IN Exploring (science, math, social studies)
MD Exploring (RFP for creative, integrative approaches to whole language maybe w/social studies, science, math
MN Exploring/Developing (science, soc'l stu,3-day writing)
NM Exploring (reading, writing portfolios) - voluntary participation
OR Exploring (writing portfolios, math) - interested in P.E, fitness/health, science, social studies, art, music
KY Plans (curricular goals not set yet)
TX Plans (interested in integrated writing & soc'l studies)

STATES NOT CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

AR No plans (interested in writing portfolios)
FL No plans (interested in science portfolios)
GA No plans (interested in science)
IA No statewide testing
ID No plans (committee next year to consider possibilities & start developing)
KS No plans (working with districts on math portfolios)
LA No plans
MS No plans
MO No plans
MT No plans
NE No statewide testing (working w/teachers on writing & math portfolios & art)
NV No plans
NH No plans
ND No plans
OH No plans
OK No plans
PA No plans - (interested in science)
RI No plans - (IN PLACE: usual voluntary merit recognition program for 12th graders in art, vocational skills, & academic subjects - not part of state assessment)
SC No plans (considering calculators in math)
SD No plans
TN No plans
UT No plans (interested in writing in content areas)
VA No plans
WA No plans
WV No plans
WI No plans (interested in science, language arts)
WY No plans for statewide (districts will do in language arts, math, etc. for new accreditation regulations)